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ABSTRACT

Reliable child care services are widely viewed as pivotal to the success of welfare reform because most welfare recipients depend on child care in order to seek, gain, and maintain employment. Others of the working poor need it to avoid dependency on public assistance. As a result, current policy decisions and research efforts are largely focused on how to build the U.S. child care supply, but little attention has been paid to child care employment itself as a precarious, low-wage job sector. Current decision making is driven by an emphasis on child care as an essential support service for working parents, with little regard for the fact that child care employment also involves urgent and complex research and policy questions. Child care is one of the fastest-growing occupations in the country, and one of the largest employers of low-income women; it is being increasingly identified as a job opportunity for women coming off welfare; and the poor conditions that are characteristic of child care jobs raise serious concerns not only about the viability of child care employment as a living-wage job, but also about the quality of services available to millions of children. (Contains 42 references.) (Author)

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THE FOUNDATION FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT

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CHILD CARE EMPLOYMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S SELF SUFFICIENCY AND FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT

MARCY WHITEBOOK AND DEBORAH PHILLIPS

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WORKING PAPER SERIES

CHILD CARE EMPLOYMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S SELF SUFFICIENCY AND FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Marcy Whitebook, Ph.D.
Center for the Child Care Workforce

Deborah Phillips, Ph.D.
Board on Children, Youth, and Families
National Research Council/Institute of Medicine

January 1999

Foundation for Child Development
345 East 46th Street
New York, NY 10017-3562
212/697-3150
212/697-2258 (fax)
ffcd.org

ABSTRACT

Reliable child care services are widely viewed as pivotal to the success of welfare reform, because most welfare recipients depend on child care in order to seek, gain and maintain employment. Others of the working poor also need it in order to avoid dependency on public assistance. As a result, current policy decisions and research efforts are largely focused on how to build the U.S. child care supply, but unfortunately, they typically pay scant attention to child care employment itself as a precarious, low-wage job sector.

Current decision making is driven by an emphasis on child care as an essential support service for working parents, with little regard for the fact that child care employment also involves urgent and complex research and policy questions. Child care is one of the fastest-growing occupations in the country, and one of the largest employers of low-income women; it is being increasingly identified as a job opportunity for women coming off welfare; and the poor conditions that are characteristic of child care jobs raise serious concerns not only about the viability of childcare employment as a living-wage job, but also about the quality of services available to millions of children.

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INTRODUCTION

COMPELLING EVIDENCE EXISTS THAT MUCH EMPLOYMENT, PARTICULARLY IN THE LOW-WAGE SERVICE SECTOR, IS ITSELF A CAUSE OF POVERTY.

Proponents of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) argue that employment will lead to economic advancement (Levitan, S.; Gallo and Shapiro, 1993). Compelling evidence exists, however, that much employment, particularly in the low-wage service sector, is itself a cause of poverty (Kim, in press; Cunningham and Reed, 1995; Kasarda, 1996). In 1991, some two million adults in the United States lived in official poverty, despite the fact that they were employed full-time throughout the year, and nearly four times that number lived in poverty because their jobs were either part-time or seasonal (Barreras, 1998). In 1994, about 4.5 million children lived in two-parent families in which both parents combined worked 35 hours or more per week, or in a single-parent family in which the parent worked 20 or more hours per week, but remained in official poverty (Wertheimer and Moore, 1998).

THE GROWING RANKS OF THE WORKING POOR REFLECT AN INCREASING DEPENDENCY ON THE LOW-WAGE SERVICE SECTOR TO PROVIDE CAREGIVING FUNCTIONS IN FOOD SERVICE, HEALTH CARE, AND EDUCATION-RELATED INDUSTRIES SUCH AS CHILDCARE.

Interest in families who labor in low-wage jobs, remain in poverty, and find it difficult to meet their children's developmental needs for food, housing, health care, and quality childcare, has risen sharply in recent years, and is likely to persist as the ranks of the working poor swell in response to the work requirements and time limits recently imposed by the PRWORA (Zaslow, Tout, Smith and Moore, 1998). It is likely that many, if not most, former welfare recipients will find employment in entry-level jobs paying minimum wage or slightly higher (Weisbrot, 1997). The growing ranks of the working poor, however, cannot solely be attributed to changes in welfare policy. They also reflect an increasing polarization of wages between the wealthiest and poorest Americans, and an increasing dependency on the low-wage service sector to provide caregiving functions in food service, health care, and education-related industries such as childcare (Kasarda, 1996; American Psychological Association, 1998). Despite the current large-scale effort to move former welfare recipients into the workforce, American working poor families remain at risk for needing public assistance (Edin and Lein, 1997; Hartmann, Spalter-Roth, Yi and Shaw, 1997).

THE CHILDCARE WORKFORCE

THE CHILD CARE WORKFORCE IS COMPRISED PRIMARILY OF WOMEN IN THEIR CHILD-BEARING YEARS, THE MAJORITY OF WHOM ARE MOTHERS, OFTEN OF YOUNG CHILDREN.

Our particular interest is in the childcare workforce, a fast-growing subgroup of the working poor (U.S. Department of Labor, 1998). The workforce is comprised primarily (98 percent) of women in their child-bearing years, the majority of whom are mothers, often of young children. It is striking that in the context of substantial policy attention to the working poor and numerous studies of welfare recipients' efforts to make the transition from dependency to employment, no attention is being given to the hundreds of thousands of women who labor in very low-wage jobs as childcare providers, with an average hourly wage of $6.70.

SOME CHILD CARE SETTINGS ARE LEGALLY EXEMPT FROM LICENSING (ALTHOUGH MAY BE UNDERWRITTEN BY PUBLIC FUNDS), IN WHICH CASE LITTLE IF ANY PRE-SERVICE OR ONGOING WORKER TRAINING OR PREPARATION IS REQUIRED.

Several million childcare workers spend their days caring for and educating the young children of working parents. Approximately three million work in some kind of governmentally regulated setting, whether in a childcare center, a Head Start facility, a public or private school, their own home, or the home of a child in their care. Some of these settings are legally exempt from licensing (although may be underwritten by public funds), in which case little if any pre-service or ongoing worker training or preparation is required. Other settings may require a college degree, credential or other certification. And while actual counts are unavailable, it is estimated that at least half again as many workers are caring for children in unregulated settings.

CHILDCARE WORKERS NOT ONLY PROVIDE CRUCIAL SUPPORT TO WORKING POOR AND MARGINALLY SELF-SUFFICIENT FAMILIES, BUT THE MAJORITY ARE THEMSELVES A LARGE SUBGROUP OF THE WORKING POOR, WITH THEIR OWN TENUOUS HOLD ON SELF-SUFFICIENCY.

Childcare employment intersects every aspect of efforts to build economically viable and healthy communities. A skilled and stable childcare workforce is a pre-condition to providing high-quality childcare services that are both reliable for working parents and developmentally sound and nurturing for children (Whitebook, Howes and Phillips, 1990). To be truly dependable and growth-enhancing – with well-trained caregivers who remain on the job – childcare programs must also provide decent and sustaining employment conditions. To the contrary, the current childcare job market, with few exceptions, itself fuels poverty (Center for the Childcare Workforce, 1998a). Childcare workers not only provide crucial support to working poor and marginally self-sufficient families, but the majority are themselves a large subgroup of the working poor, with their own tenuous hold on self-sufficiency.

Despite increased public investment in the U.S. childcare system during the last ten years, there is considerable evidence that the proportion of childcare workers earning

JOB CONDITIONS IN THE FIELD REMAIN WOEFULLY INADEQUATE.

CHILDCARE WORKERS EARN POVERTY-LEVEL SALARIES, DESPITE ABOVE-AVERAGE LEVELS OF EDUCATION.

POOR AND MINORITY WOMEN ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY REPRESENTED AT ENTRY-LEVEL JOBS.

poverty-level wages has increased during this period (Kasarda, 1996), leading to problems of unstable care, under-staffing, and the strong potential for unsafe conditions for children (Bellm, Burton, Shukla and Whitebook, 1997). Job conditions in the field remain woefully inadequate:

- The average center-based childcare teacher nationwide earns roughly $6.70 an hour, despite above-average levels of education (Whitebook, et al., 1990). Roughly one-third of teachers are paid the minimum wage (Whitebook, et al., 1990). More than two-thirds of full-time childcare workers have annual earnings below the poverty threshold, the highest concentration of poverty-wage workers in any industry (Kasarda, 1996). Even those at the highest end of the pay scale, who are likely to have a BA degree and several years of experience, earn on average less than $20,000 a year (Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips, 1998). Family childcare providers, who care for small groups of children in their own homes, earn even lower wages: those who are subject to licensing or other forms of regulation earn between $8,344 and $10,000 per year after expenses, and non-regulated providers earn only $5,132 (Helburn and Haines, 1996; Burton, Whitebook, Sakai, Babula and Haack, 1994). Providers can work very long hours, often 50 or more per week with children as well as several hours shopping, cleaning, preparing activities, etc. Further, to earn even this modest level of income, providers generally need to maintain high enrollments, and often make costly renovations to their homes to make them safe and appropriate for group childcare.

- Childcare is a relatively easy field of employment for anyone to enter. But because of unequal access to training, education and other avenues of career advancement, poor and minority women tend to remain disproportionately at the entry-level, lowest-paid childcare jobs (National Black Child Development Institute, 1993).

- Despite workers' high exposure to illness and physical strain on the job, fewer than one-third of childcare centers provide fully-paid health insurance. Many more centers offer partial coverage; however, anecdotal reports suggest that teaching staff frequently do not utilize partially-paid benefits due to their inability to afford the premiums, a phenomenon that is common across industries (Ginsburg, Gobel, and Hunt, 1998). Even fewer offer a pension plan. (In seeking access to health insurance and other benefits, family childcare providers fare even worse.) Many center-based childcare staff are expected to work without breaks,

CHILDCARE WORKERS HAVE FEW BENEFITS.

and often for extra hours without pay. Fewer than four percent have a union contract. Ironically, too, childcare workers rarely receive assistance with their own childcare needs, and many find it unaffordable to purchase the care that their own programs offer.

HIGH TURNOVER CHARACTERIZES THE WORKFORCE.

- Roughly one-third of the nation's childcare workforce leave the job each year – most often, to earn a better living elsewhere. At such a rate of turnover, the shortage of trained and qualified workers has become a national staffing crisis (Whitebook and Bellm, 1999). Those who do remain on the job share the extra burden of constantly training new co-workers, and the quality of services that children and parents receive continues to decline dangerously.

PATTERNS OF WORK

CHILDCARE WORKERS VARY CONSIDERABLY IN THEIR PATTERNS OF WORK AND IN WHETHER THEIR EMPLOYMENT IS COMBINED OR INTERSPERSED WITH RELIANCE ON PUBLIC ASSISTANCE.

The similarities among childcare workers in terms of wages, working conditions, and status belie the tremendous diversity that characterizes the workforce with respect to job settings, family economic status, education, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, and pathways into the occupation. Like other members of working poor families, childcare workers vary considerably in their patterns of work and in whether their employment is combined or interspersed with reliance on public assistance (Spalter-Roth, Burr, Hartmann, Shaw, Braunstein and Dennis, 1995). Some are heads of households working full-time, year-round in low-wage jobs that fail to lift their families out of poverty. In other cases, work is highly intermittent, or low-wage jobs are held by multiple family members in order to increase family income. Just as working poor families are clearly a very diverse group, childcare workers also represent a wide variety of work patterns, family structures, and household incomes.

HOUSEHOLD FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

SINGLE CENTER-BASED TEACHERS SELDOM ACHIEVE SELF-SUFFICIENCY FOR THEMSELVES OR THEIR CHILDREN.

At the time of the original National Childcare Staffing Study in 1989 (Whitebook, et al., 1990), there were large differences among members of the childcare workforce regarding levels of financial responsibility for their households. While the composition of the workforce has shifted since then, as we discuss below, we found at that time that nearly half of center-based teachers were married or living with a partner, and approximately one-fourth of them were living in households with incomes above the median. In stark contrast, single center-based teachers seldom achieved self-sufficiency for themselves or their

children. On average, married staff with children were responsible for 20 percent of the household income, compared with 35 percent for those married without children, while the earnings of single parents made up 74 percent of household income.

INCOME VARIATION

AMONG HOME-BASED PROVIDERS, CONSIDERABLE VARIATION IN HOUSEHOLD INCOME WAS FOUND TO EXIST DEPENDING ON WHETHER THEY WERE REGULATED OR NONREGULATED, AND/OR WHETHER THEY WERE RELATIVES OF THE CHILDREN RECEIVING CARE.

In data from the early 1990s, approximately three-fourths of home-based providers were found to be married or living with a partner; 40 percent lived in households with annual incomes below $20,000; one-third in households with annual incomes ranging from $20,000 to $40,000; and one-quarter in households with annual incomes over $40,000. Even among home-based providers, considerable variation was found to exist depending on whether they were regulated or nonregulated, and/or whether they were relatives of the children receiving care. In the latter case, nearly two-thirds lived in households with annual incomes of less than $20,000, compared to one-quarter for those who provided regulated care (Kontos, Howes, Shinn and Galinsky, 1995).

EFFECTS ON CHILDREN

ALTHOUGH CHILDCARE WORK DOES PERMIT AUTONOMY AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROBLEM SOLVING IN SOME SETTINGS, THESE BENEFITS MAY NOT OFFSET THE LOW WAGES AND NONSTANDARD WORK HOURS THAT CHARACTERIZE MANY OF THE NEW CHILDCARE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES.

While there is some research evidence that low-wage childcare jobs have a negative effect on children using these services, there are no data on the impact of childcare employment on the many children of childcare workers themselves, even though current policy efforts may swell the childcare workforce with former welfare recipients who are typically mothers of young children (Zaslow and Emig, 1997; Moore, Zaslow and Driscoll, 1996). The existing research on maternal employment is primarily focused on middle-income families. When low-income families are studied separately, the results are fairly consistent in showing that children are not hurt by and often benefit from maternal employment, in particular with regard to cognitive outcomes (Allesandri, 1992; McLoyd, Jayaratne, Ceballo and Borquez, 1994; Moore and Driscoll, 1997; Vandell and Ramanan, 1992; Zaslow and Emig, 1997). More recently, investigators have explored how the circumstances of work (e.g., wages, hours and working conditions) mediate the effects of maternal employment on children in low-income families (Menaghan and Parcel, 1995; Parcel and Menaghan, 1994). This literature has documented the negative effects on children's home environments of low-wage jobs that are low in "occupational complexity" – defined as jobs with highly routinized work, few opportunities for problem solving and little autonomy (Menaghan and Parcel, 1995). Negative

effects on the home environments of jobs that require non-standard work hours have also been found (Heymann and Earle, 1996). Although childcare work does permit autonomy and opportunities for problem solving in some settings (Bloom, 1996; Whitebook et al, 1990), these benefits may not offset the low wages and non-standard work hours that characterize many of the entry-level childcare employment opportunities.

ETHNIC AND LINGUISTIC BACKGROUND

WITHIN CHILDCARE PROGRAMS, WOMEN OF COLOR ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY IN ENTRY-LEVEL POSITIONS.

The ethnic and linguistic background of childcare workers also reflects tremendous diversity. A study of 432 childcare centers in California found that 50 percent of the centers employed staff from multiple ethnic groups, and nearly one-third (31 percent) employed staff from two ethnic groups (Phillips and Crowell, 1994; Chang and Sakai, 1993). One-third of the staff in the National Childcare Staffing Study were women of color (Whitebook, et al., 1990). Within childcare programs, women of color are disproportionately in entry-level positions, although in certain sectors of center-based care, a far greater percentage of staff are women of color, often employed in the better-paying childcare jobs. The San Francisco Unified School District, for example, pays the highest wages in the city, and two-thirds of the staff are people of color (Childcare Law Center, 1995). Among home-based providers, there is a higher concentration of women of color among relatives and unregulated caregivers than among those who are regulated. For example, a recent study found 71 percent of regulated providers were Caucasian, in contrast to 59 percent of non-regulated and 28 percent of relative caregivers (Kontos, et al., 1995).

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

DEPENDING ON WHETHER PROVIDERS ARE REGULATED OR NONREGULATED, AND/OR ARE RELATIVES PROVIDING CARE, THE DISTRIBUTION OF EDUCATIONAL LEVEL SHIFTS DRAMATICALLY.

Similarly, tremendous diversity among members of the childcare workforce exists with respect to educational background. Among home-based providers, approximately one-quarter have not completed high school, yet nearly 20 percent have completed college or more (Kontos, et al., 1995). Again, depending on whether providers are regulated or non-regulated, and/or are relatives providing care, the distribution of educational level shifts dramatically. Only six percent of relatives providing childcare have completed college and nearly half have not completed high school. In contrast, one-quarter of regulated providers have completed college or more, and only 22 percent have not completed high school. More than one-half of the assistant teachers and nearly three-quarters of the teachers in the

National Childcare Staffing Study had some college background (Whitebook, et al., 1990).

MOTIVATIONS FOR ENTERING THE FIELD

ONLY 13 PERCENT PROVIDING HOME-BASED CARE STATED THAT WANTING TO WORK WITH CHILDREN WAS THEIR PRIMARY REASON FOR PURSUING THIS OCCUPATION.

Given the diversity of the childcare workforce, it is not surprising that members come to the work for a variety of reasons and via different pathways. To date, we know little about their motivations for entering the field. The most comprehensive examination of this question is for home-based care, and the data were collected prior to the changes in childcare funding resulting from welfare reform (Kontos, et al., 1995). Nearly half of the participants in that study claimed that staying home with their own children was the primary motivation. One-fifth decided to become providers to help the mothers of the children in their care, but interestingly, only 13 percent stated that wanting to work with children was their primary reason for pursuing this occupation.

OVER TWO-THIRDS OF REGULATED PROVIDERS STATED THAT CHILDCARE WAS THEIR CHOSEN OCCUPATION.

Again, differences emerged depending on the sector of care in which providers worked. Nearly two-thirds of regulated providers stated that staying home with their children was their primary reason for becoming a provider, in contrast to only 22 percent of relative caregivers. As might be expected, nearly 60 percent of relative caregivers stated that their main reason was the desire to help the mothers of the children in their care. Over two-thirds of regulated providers stated that childcare was their chosen occupation, in contrast to 43 percent of non-regulated and 23 percent of relative caregivers.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

FOR WOMEN COMING OFF WELFARE, DIFFERENT OPTIONS REPRESENT VERY DIFFERENT WORKING CONDITIONS, WAGES, BENEFITS, AND LONG-TERM PROSPECTS FOR SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT.

Despite the rather bleak picture of childcare as a poverty-level occupation, it is important to recognize that childcare employment can and does provide living wages and lifelong career opportunities for a small segment of the workforce. Yet we only partially understand the circumstances that allow some workers to access and keep such childcare jobs. We know, for example, that the childcare work environment itself has a great deal to do with the quality of childcare employment. But we know little about how childcare providers' education and employment histories, and the families in which they live, influence the sector of the childcare industry in which they become employed, or their long-term prospects in the field. Women in similar economic circumstances may find employment caring for

children in their homes or in center-based care. For women coming off welfare, these different options represent very different working conditions, wages, benefits, and long-term prospects for sustainable employment. Within each sector, there is also considerable variation in job conditions (Layzer, 1993).

THE PROSPECTS FOR WOMEN WORKING IN HEAD START OR PUBLIC SCHOOL PROGRAMS ARE NOTABLY MORE PROMISING THAN EMPLOYMENT IN PRIVATE CHILDCARE.

For example, the prospects for women working in Head Start or public school programs can be notably more promising than employment in private childcare. The 1998 National Childcare Staffing Study update found that centers employing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients were more likely to pay lower wages across all positions and to experience higher teaching staff turnover (Whitebook, et al., 1998). Fewer than 20 percent of the programs currently offered TANF recipients college-credit-bearing training, which is always required by better-paying childcare jobs that offer the best hope of achieving economic independence; most paid only slightly higher than minimum wage.

EMPLOYMENT IN HEAD START, WHICH HAS BEEN AND CONTINUES TO BE A PATHWAY INTO THE WORKFORCE FOR MANY WELFARE RECIPIENTS, GUARANTEES ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLEGE-BASED TRAINING.

By contrast, employment in Head Start, which has been and continues to be a pathway into the workforce for many welfare recipients, emphasizes ongoing professional development and opportunities for college-based training (Whitebook and Gaidurjis, 1995). In most cases, despite low salaries, Head Start jobs provide health and retirement benefits that are typically unavailable in private childcare settings, and while many Head Start programs lament the fact that their teachers, once trained, often move on, they typically access public school-based programs that offer higher wages than Head Start programs. In California, for example, assistant teachers in public school settings with a few college courses earn more than teachers in private childcare with Bachelor's degrees (Whitebook and Burton, 1996).

Within home-based care, incomes vary depending on clients' income. Family childcare providers in middle- to high-income neighborhoods can earn substantially more than those offering services to working-class or poor families. Furthermore, providers who are part of a network typically have access to better benefits and training opportunities (Kontos, et al., 1995).

ECONOMIC EQUITY

To the extent that policy makers consider childcare employment for welfare recipients, they do so with little

concern about issues of economic equity. While there is a great deal of interest in building the childcare system to meet the increasing demand for services, there is a dearth of attention to the quality of the jobs being created. Ironically, childcare jobs and services are seen as essential to the success of welfare reform, even though childcare employment is highly unlikely to offer a livelihood that can sustain a single adult, let alone her children.

FOR MORE EXPERIENCED AND TRAINED TEACHERS AND PROVIDERS, AN INFLUX OF UNTRAINED, ENTRY-LEVEL WORKERS COMING OFF THE WELFARE ROLLS IS LIKELY TO DRIVE WAGES DOWN FURTHER AND REDUCE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT.

Over half of the states are currently operating programs specifically targeted to creating childcare employment for TANF recipients (Center for the Childcare Workforce, 1998b). As currently designed, the majority of these programs place limited emphasis on skills training and education and are thus unlikely to prepare participants for the small number of better-paying childcare jobs, which require college course work and degrees (Bloom, 1997; Roberts and Padde, 1998). And for more experienced and trained teachers and providers, such an influx of untrained, entry-level workers coming off the welfare rolls is likely to drive wages down and reduce opportunities for advancement even further (Weisbrot, 1997).

SHORTAGES OF QUALIFIED TEACHERS

MANY DIRECTORS REPORT HIRING TEACHERS THEY WOULD HAVE PREVIOUSLY CONSIDERED AS UNQUALIFIED.

A serious teacher shortage in many elementary school districts is creating new incentives for the best-trained, most experienced childcare workers to leave the field for better-paying careers. In California and other states, recent class-size reductions in the early primary grades have greatly increased opportunities for well-trained childcare teachers and family childcare providers to obtain better-paying elementary teaching jobs. Reports from the field are now proliferating of the severe difficulty that childcare programs are having in recruiting and hiring qualified replacement staff; many directors report hiring teachers they would have previously considered as unqualified (Whitebook, et al., 1998). In 1998, Congress passed a similar class-size reduction policy nationwide.

IMPACT OF POOR EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS

To date, investments in childcare employment, though limited, have most often been motivated by the desire to improve the quality of services for children, while only secondarily providing better opportunities for advancement for low-income teachers and providers (Bellm, et al., 1997). In reality, these two goals should be closely linked, since high turnover and low compensation among caregivers

POOR CHILDCARE EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS HAVE A DOUBLY NEGATIVE IMPACT, AFFECTING NOT ONLY CHILDCARE WORKERS THEMSELVES (AT LEAST HALF OF WHOM HAVE CHILDREN OF THEIR OWN), BUT WITH BROADER CONSEQUENCES FOR THE EDUCATIONAL AND ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF THE CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES THAT CHILDCARE PROGRAMS SERVE.

have been shown to have direct and harmful effects on the quality of care children receive, and on children's ability to socialize and learn. Research has also shown that poor children are more vulnerable than others to low-quality childcare, and that they benefit more than others from better-quality care (Whitebook, et al., 1990; Whitebook, Phillips and Howes, 1993; Helburn, 1995). Poor childcare employment conditions, therefore, have a doubly negative impact, affecting not only childcare workers themselves (at least half of whom have children of their own), but with broader consequences for the educational and economic well-being of the children, families and communities that childcare programs serve.

CONCLUSION

PUBLIC POLICY EFFORTS AND PRIVATE INVESTMENTS HAVE EMPHASIZED TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS, WITH FEWER VOICES ADDRESSING THE NEED FOR IMPROVED COMPENSATION TO STABILIZE THIS WORKFORCE.

To the extent that public policy efforts and private investments have focused on the childcare workforce, they have emphasized training and professional development programs, with fewer voices addressing the need for improved compensation to stabilize this workforce. In 1998 alone, however, the severity of the shortage of qualified early childhood teachers has prompted Congress to fund increases in salaries for Head Start workers, and there have been numerous actions at the state level. The California legislature, for example, passed a bill (later vetoed by the Governor) that would have provided stipends of up to $6,000 per year to retain trained teachers and providers in the childcare system. Several states have trained teachers and providers in the childcare system. Several states have implemented T.E.A.C.H., a program providing scholarships and bonuses to early childhood workers who complete college-level training. At this point, however, these efforts have touched only a small segment of the workforce.

THE MASSIVE EFFORTS TO REFORM THE U.S. WELFARE SYSTEM AND TO EXPAND CHILDCARE SERVICES ARE UNLIKELY TO SUCCEED UNLESS WE COME TO A CLEARER UNDERSTANDING OF HOW CHILD CARE JOBS CAN BEST OFFER ECONOMIC SECURITY FOR WORKERS AND STABLE, HIGH QUALITY EXPERIENCES FOR CHILDREN.

Overall, unfortunately, the current atmosphere of desperation – not only to move TANF recipients into the workforce, but to find a sufficient number of childcare workers to staff new and expanding programs – is coming into serious conflict with common sense, as programs are being developed and childcare hiring decisions being made that run counter to the goals of employing promising candidates, ensuring economically viable jobs, and providing reliable, developmentally sound services for working parents and their children. The massive efforts to reform the U.S. welfare system and to expand childcare services are unlikely to succeed unless we come to a clearer understanding of how child-care jobs can best offer

economic security for workers and stable, high quality experiences for all children.

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